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# Russia's Big Bluff Puts U.S. in Policy Dilemma in Middle East

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The Soviet Union has charged into the Near East and now stands astride it with one foot in Syria and the other in Egypt, pretending to be the champion of the Arabs and of freedom from colonialism and imperialist domination.

The present situation is a catastrophe the magnitude of which is hardly realized. As a minimum, the industrial prosperity of Europe is threatened by a shortage of petroleum. As a maximum, the very survival of France and Great Britain as major powers is at stake.

The temporary stoppage of the flow of petroleum due to the closing of the Suez canal and to blowing up pumping stations in Syria on the oil pipelines from Iraq will be serious itself and is certain to cause an industrial and transportation slow-down in Europe before the flow of oil is resumed.

But even more important is the long-range prospect that the Soviet Union will replace the Western powers as the principal military and industrial support of the Arab states in the Near East. This would lead to nationalization on Soviet urging of the oil resources of the Arab states, except possibly Iraq, and the use of control over oil supplies to Europe as a form of blackmail envisaged by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in his book "The Philosophy of the Revolution."

There has never been any question of Russian intentions in the Middle and Far East. They have for centuries attempted to get control of the Dardanelles outlet from the Black sea to the Mediterranean and for just as long they have coveted Iran and the sea outlet of the Persian gulf. The fact that it is now known that about 70 per cent of the world's oil reserves are in the Middle East and the Arab states has only reinforced the ancient Russian ambition to dominate the area.

The Soviet Union is not trying to take over the Arab states by its familiar line of internal subversion and revolution. Instead it is playing on the Arab's distrust of the Western powers, and is offering economic and military aid on a large

scale and is posturing as the protector of Arab freedom. The Russians had actually supplied more than \$420,000,000 worth of arms to Egypt and \$56,000,000 to Syria.

The Israeli-Franco-British invasion of Egypt gave the Soviets their great chance to prove their friendship. They demanded intermediate intervention by the United States with them. They threatened unilaterally to use force to drive the aggressors out.

After the invasion they offered "volunteers." There were alleged to be 50,000 pledged in the Soviet Union and 250,000 in China. Possibly they overreached themselves here. The Arabs have no more desire to have Soviet and Chinese soldiers occupying their countries than they want British and French. At least the "volunteers" have not been accepted by Egypt.

Nor were the military authorities of the Western powers the least bit disturbed by the threat of "volunteers." In this they were quite different from the terrified delegates at the United Nations who were at first incredibly upset at this threat.

The truth is that Soviet and Chinese "volunteers" cannot get into Egypt in any numbers, nor could they be maintained there. Egypt is blockaded by land and sea and an air blockade would not be difficult.

It appears that even more than a threat to drive the Soviet offer of volunteers was mainly to impress the Arab states with Soviet willingness to do everything to aid them. It was propaganda.

Without starting a general war, the Soviet Union does not have the military capacity to influence the situation in Egypt and the Near East to any important degree.

In contrast, it has had the courage to threaten or bluff about the actions it will take to such a degree that, with the United States supporting it, it has managed to halt the British-French operation before it was half completed. It has not away with a stupendous bluff and in the process has distracted attention from its bloody suppression of Hungary. Although the British-French invasion of Egypt may have surprised President Eisenhower, this was not due to failure of our

intelligence agencies. The same can be said of the Israeli mobilization. The necessary intelligence was available, but as with most intelligence, there were conflicting indications. One fault for inexperienced civilian control of military and intelligence operations is the civilian's inability to give due weight to indications and to his unwillingness to believe that a cataclysm may be imminent.

So, although the intelligence was available, it either was misinterpreted or it did not get through the staff protecting the President.

There are few assets for the West to use to salvage its position in the Near East. The first one is the British and French armies in Egypt. They can be kept there until some sort of general settlement is worked out.

Unfortunately, the United States is pressing Great Britain and France, by diplomatic means and, by the threat of withholding oil from the western hemisphere, to get out fast.

In military quarters, this is considered very unwise, just as the military thought it a mistake, once the invasion was under way without our knowledge, to support the Soviet demand that it stop before the operation was completed.

The military felt that since the stigma of aggression had already been acquired with the attendant difficulties, it would be better to have the asset of recognition of the canal zone instead of the added stigma of backing down before Soviet threats.

Another Western asset is that the Arab states must sell their oil and the West is their main customer. Nowhere else is there a demand for one quarter of the oil available. While the Arab states may refuse, at the minute and until the British and French leave Egypt, to allow their oil to go to these two countries, the attitude must give way in time.

There is little hope for a satisfactory general settlement. The Soviet Union will participate in it now. The terms of a general settlement would include operation of the canal satisfactory to both the users and Egypt, peace between Israel and the Arab states, a guarantee of the borders of Israel and the Arab states, its boundaries, limitation of arms in the area

and an end to Nasser's fomenting revolution in Algeria and his anti-Western propaganda all over the Arab world. Instead of all this, about all that can be hoped for is a positive promise of Western support to Israel against Arab aggression.

In an utterly real sense, Israel had to make war against the Arab states before the Arab states, with Soviet arms and military advisers, had become strong enough to carry out their many times announced determination to destroy Israel.

It was apparent as soon as Egypt made a deal for Soviet arms in September, 1955 that war between the Arab states and Israel was certain unless some action was taken toward a settlement in the Near East, but the United States policy was to drift and hope for the best.

As Walter Lippmann wrote of the President: "He reacts peaceably when a crisis reaches a point where war might come. He does not react much sooner. He reacts to what is happening and does little to foresee and little to prepare for what is going to happen."

Perhaps not so obviously or so far, but almost surely, ultimately a solution that seemed impossible to reach peacefully in the Near East that would guarantee freedom of passage of the Suez canal without Egyptian blackmail and continued access to the oil resources of the Arab states and, from this essential, the survival of Great Britain and France. This solution was by force to regain control of the Suez canal and destroy Nasser's anti-Western dominance of the Near East.

The United States reaction to the invasion of Egypt has been to join the Soviet Union in branding the invaders as aggressors, in halting the operation, in turning certain success into failure and now in forcing them out of Egypt.

This is all highly moral idealism consonance with the principles of the United Nations. It also shows a startling lack of understanding of the vital, the mortal interest of Great Britain and France in the Near East.

In the Pentagon our policy is deplored and in the State Department there is much disagreement with it. They are asking now that we have given our principles, whether our allies also survive.

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